**Listing of Claims:**

Claims 1-10 (Canceled).

11.   (Currently Amended) An image pickup apparatus comprising:

an image pickup element for picking up an image of an object;

5      a shutter key for producing an operation signal when depressed; and

a main control <u>unit</u> for directly receiving the operation signal produced by operating the shutter key, for sensing ~~as an interrupt signal~~ an initial change <u>to an on state</u> in the

10    operation signal <u>and</u> ~~to thereby give~~ <u>providing</u> an instruction to cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of the object <u>when the on state is sensed once</u>, and for determining that the shutter key is released when an off state of the operation signal ~~was~~ <u>is</u> sensed successively a predetermined

15    number of times by sampling the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.

12.   (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 11, further comprising:

a sub control unit for sampling a second operation signal, produced by depressing a key switch, at predetermined intervals

5    of time to thereby produce a sampled signal, and for delivering

information on the sampled signal to the main control unit.


13.   (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to

claim 11, further comprising:

a sub control unit for directly receiving a second operation

signal produced by depressing a key switch, for sensing an on

5    state of the received second operation signal, and delivering

information on the sensed on state of the second operation signal

to the main control unit.


14.   (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to

claim 11, further comprising:

an image processor, responsive to the instruction given by

the main control unit, for producing a drive timing signal to

5    cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of

the object, and for processing data on the image of the object

picked up by the image pickup element.


15.   (Currently Amended) An image pickup apparatus

comprising:

an image pickup element for picking up an image of an

object;

5      a shutter key for producing an operation signal when

depressed;

a main control unit for directly receiving the operation

signal produced by operating the shutter key, for ~~once~~ sensing <u>an</u>

<u>initial change to</u> an on state of the operation signal by sampling

10     the operation signal at predetermined intervals of time <u>and</u> ~~to~~

~~thereby give~~ <u>providing</u> an instruction to cause the image pickup

element to start to pick up the image of the object <u>when the on</u>

<u>state is sensed once</u>, and for determining that the shutter key is

released when an off state of the operation signal ~~was~~ <u>is</u> sensed

15     successively a predetermined number of times by sampling the

operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.


16.   (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to

claim 15, further comprising:

a sub control unit for sampling a second operation signal,

produced by depressing a key switch, at predetermined intervals

5      of time to thereby produce a sampled signal, and for delivering

information on the sampled signal to the main control unit.


17.   (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to

claim 15, further comprising:

a sub control unit for directly receiving a second operation

signal produced by depressing a key switch, for sensing an on

5    state of the received second operation signal, and delivering

information on the sensed on state of the received second

operation signal to the main control unit.


18.   (Original) The image pickup apparatus according to

claim 15, further comprising:

an image processor, responsive to the instruction given by

the main control unit, for producing a drive timing signal to

5    cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of

the object, and for processing data on the image of the object

picked up by the image pickup element.


Claims 19-20 (Canceled).


21.   (Currently Amended) An image pickup method comprising

~~the steps of~~:

directly receiving an operation signal produced by

depression of a shutter key; [[,]]

5    sensing ~~as an interrupt signal~~ an initial change to an on

state in the operation signal, and ~~to thereby instruct~~ then

instructing an image pickup element to pick up an image of an

object when the on state is sensed once; and

determining that the shutter key is released when an off

10   state of the operation signal ~~was~~ is sensed successively a

predetermined number of times by sampling the operation signal at

predetermined intervals of time.


22.   (Currently Amended) An image pickup method comprising

~~the steps of~~:

directly receiving an operation signal produced by

depression of a shutter key; [[,]]

5        sensing <u>an initial change to</u> an on state of the operation

signal by sampling the operation signal at predetermined

intervals of time, and then instructing an image pickup element

to start to pick up an image of an object when the on state of

the operation signal ~~was~~ <u>is</u> sensed once; and

10       determining that the shutter key is released when an off

state of the operation signal ~~was~~ <u>is</u> sensed successively a

predetermined number of times by sampling the operation signal at

predetermined intervals of time.


23.   (New) An image pickup apparatus comprising:

an image pickup element for picking up an image of an

object;

a shutter key for producing a first operation signal when

depressed;

a key switch for producing a second operation signal when

depressed;

a main control unit directly connected to the shutter key

for sensing an on state of the first operation signal, and for

instructing the image pickup element to start to pick up the

image of the object when the on state of the first operation

signal is sensed; and

a sub control unit connected to the key switch for sensing

an on state of the second operation signal, and for delivering

information on the sensed on state of the second operation signal

to the main control unit.


24.  (New) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 23,

wherein the main control unit senses an initial change to the on

state in the first operation signal produced by operating the

shutter key, and instructs the image pickup element to start to

5        pickup the image of the object when the on state of the first

operation signal is sensed once.


25.  (New) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 24,

wherein the main control unit senses the initial change to the on

state in the first operation signal by sampling the first

operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.


26.  (New) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 23,

wherein the main control unit determines that the shutter key is

released when an off state of the first operation signal is

sensed successively a predetermined number of times by sampling

the first operation signal at predetermined intervals of time.


27.    (New) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 23,

wherein the sub control unit samples the second operation signal

produced by depressing the key switch at predetermined intervals

of time to thereby produce a sampled signal, and delivers

information on the sampled signal to the main control unit.


28.    (New) The image pickup apparatus according to claim 23,

further comprising:

an image processor, responsive to the instruction given by

the main control unit, for producing a drive timing signal to

cause the image pickup element to start to pick up the image of

the object, and for processing data on the image of the object

picked up by the image pickup element.


29.    (New) An image pickup method comprising:

a main control operation of directly receiving a first

operation signal from a shutter key, sensing an on state of the

first operation signal when the shutter key is depressed, and

5    instructing an image pickup element to start an image pick up

operation when the on state of the first operation signal is

sensed;

a sub control operation of receiving a second operation

signal from a key switch, sensing an on state of the second

10    operation signal when the key switch is depressed, and delivering

information on the sensed on state of the second operation signal

to a main control unit which performs the main control operation.